



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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DNA science foils cattle rustler in Eastern Washington

OLYMPIA – Modern day science defeated an old time cattle rustler earlier this year when DNA testing was used to prove the theft of seven calves. It's the first time DNA testing, so often used to resolve cases involving humans, has unraveled a livestock complaint brought before the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

Matthew David Goodwin of Deer Park was sentenced to 30 days in jail, with one year of community supervision, after he pled guilty to charges of livestock theft and forgery in March. He also was ordered to pay a \$4,000 fine and \$5,600 in restitution, court costs and victim assessments. The charges were the result of a four-month investigation by WSDA and the Washington State Patrol.

A Cheney area rancher accused Goodwin of stealing his calves. WSDA recovered the calves and DNA testing confirmed that they were the offspring of the rancher's cows. The calves had not yet been branded, a common manner used to prove ownership of livestock and horses.

"It was interesting to see a modern-day scientific technique foil one of the oldest professions," said Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian. "Our livestock investigator Ron Ferguson and livestock inspector Kris Budde were quite pleased to have solid evidence to resolve the case. The DNA evidence showed conclusively that the stolen calves were the offspring of another man's cows."

WSDA's Livestock Identification Program plans to expand its investigative work as recently enacted legislation will allow officials to upgrade Ferguson's position to full-time status. Ferguson, a former law enforcement officer, has been working part-time for WSDA since 2000 to resolve livestock theft cases, ownership disputes, physically recover cattle and perform other services for the agricultural community.

WSDA's Livestock Identification Program provides a vital public service for the \$492 million cattle industry. The program maintains the official recordings of about 7,000 livestock brands and protects cattle and horse owners by requiring proof of ownership when animals are moved out of state. Cattle also must be inspected at every change of ownership and horse ownership must be verified at public sales. Last year, WSDA inspected nearly 625,000 cattle and 14,000 horses.

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